



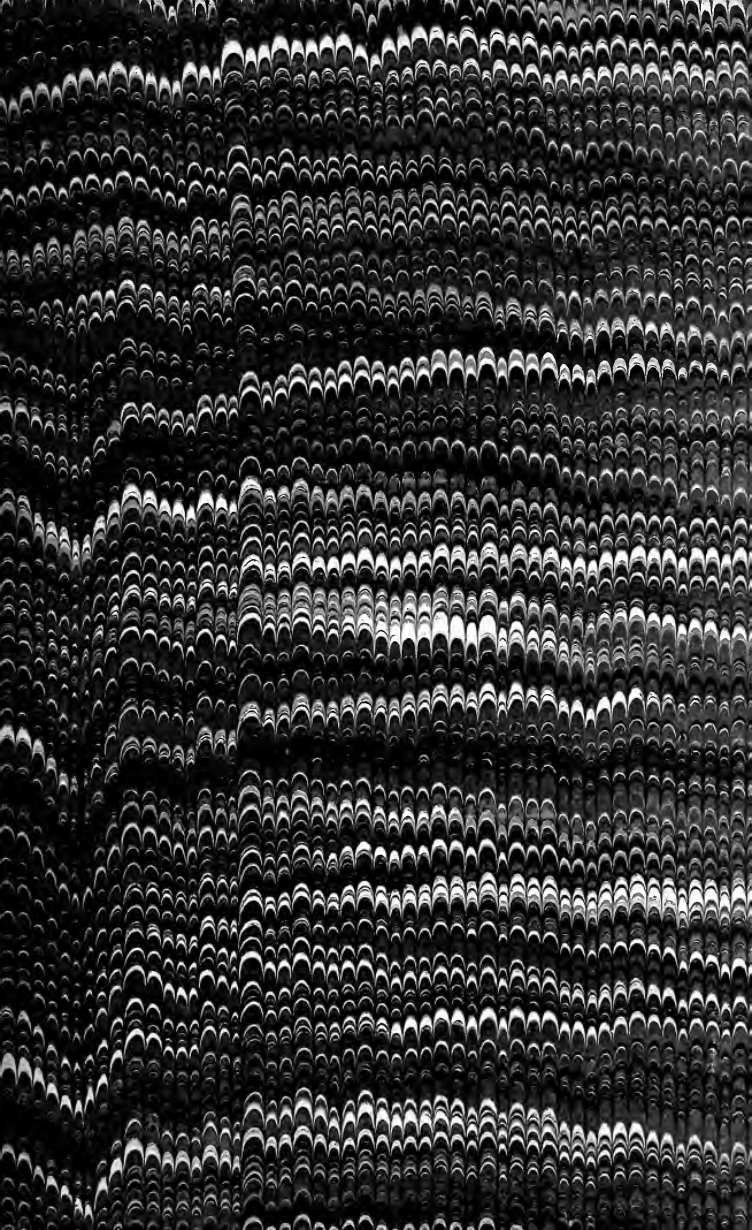
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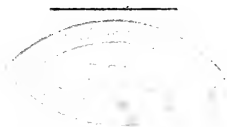
BIANCA VISCONTI.

BIANCA VISCONTI;

OR

The Heart Overtasked.

BY N. P. WILLIS.



NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL COLMAN,

No. 8 Astor House,

BROADWAY.

1839.

PS 3324

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1839

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3959

NEW-YORK:
Printed by SCATCHERD & ADAMS.
No. 38 Gold Street.

TO HER

WHOSE PRAISE IS THE FIRST SOUGHT AND THE
DEAREST,

TO HIS WIFE,

THE AUTHOR DEDICATES THIS PLAY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

FRANCESCO SFORZA—*A Condottiero of the 14th century, afterwards Duke of Milan.*

BRUNORIO—*His Lieutenant.*

SARPELLIONE—*Ambassador at Milan from Alfonso, king of Naples.*

ROSSANO—*A Milanese Captain, formerly companion in arms to Sforza.*

PASQUALI—*A whimsical Poet.*

* * *

* * *

BIANCA VISCONTI—*Daughter of Philip Visconti,* the bed-ridden Duke of Milan, and heiress-apparent to the crown.*

GIULIO—*Her Page, afterwards discovered to be her brother and heir to the crown.*

FIAMETTA—*Waiting Woman to Bianca, and partial to Pasquali. Lords of Council, Priest, Messengers, Sentinels, &c.*

* This eccentric Duke, the last of the Viscontis, passed the latter part of his life in utter seclusion, seen by no one but his physician. His habits were loathsome, and his character harsh and unnatural.

BIANCA VISCONTI:

O R

THE HEART OVERTASKED.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

[*Pasquali the poet's chamber. Fiametta mending his hose while he writes.*]

FIAMETTA.

Why dost thou never write verses upon me?

PASQUALI.

Didst thou ever hear of a cauliflower struck by lightning?

FIAMETTA.

If there were honesty in verses, thou wouldst sooner write of me than of Minerva thou talkst of. Did she ever mend thy hose for thee?

PASQUALI.

There is good reason to doubt if Minerva ever had hose on her leg.

FIAMETTA.

There now! She can be no honest woman! I thought so when thou saidst she was most willing at night.

PASQUALI.

If thy ignorance were not endless, I would instruct thee in the meanings of poetry. But thou'lt call Jupiter a cow driver, till the thunderbolt thou takest for a bunch of twigs, strike thee dead for profanity. This once understand: Minerva is no *woman*, but *wit*; and when the poet speaks of unwilling Minerva, he talks of sluggish wit—that hath nothing to do with chastity.

FIAMETTA.

Are there two names for all things then, Master Pasquali?

PASQUALI.

Ay—nearly.

FIAMETTA.

What is the learned name for honest wife?

PASQUALI.

Spouse.

FIAMETTA.

When shall I be thy spouse then?

PASQUALI.

When thou canst make up thy mind to forego all hope of living in poetry.

FIAMETTA.

Nay, if I am not to be put in verse, I may as well have a plain man for a husband.

PASQUALI.

If thou wouldst be put in verse, thou shalt have no husband at all.

FIAMETTA.

Now, wilt thou tell me why—in good common words, Master Pasquali?

PASQUALI.

Thus :—dost thou think Petrarch had e'er made Laura so famous if she had been honestly his wife?

FIAMETTA.

An she were thrifty, I think he might.

PASQUALI.

I tell thee no! His sonnets had then been as dull as the praises of the just. No man would remember them.

FIAMETTA.

Can no honest women be famous then?

PASQUALI.

Virtue disqualifies. There is no hope for her in poetry if she be not a sinner. Mention me the most famous woman in history.

FIAMETTA.

Helen of Troy, in the ballad, I think.

PASQUALI.

Wouldst thou be more virtuous than she ?

FIAMETTA.

Nay—that were presumption.

PASQUALI.

Knowst thou why she is sung in an Iliad ? I will tell thee : being the wife to Menelaus, she ran away with the prince of Troy.

FIAMETTA.

Then is it a shame to remember her.

PASQUALI.

So thou sayst in thy ignorance. Yet for that sin she hath been remembered near three thousand years. Look through all poetry, and thou'lt find it thrives upon making sinners memorable. To be famous, thou must sin. Wilt thou qualify ?

[*A rap at the door.*]

PAGE.

Master Pasquali ! Master Pasquali !

FIAMETTA.

Holy Virgin ! it is my mistress's page. An' I be found here now, I were as qualified as Helen of Troy.

[*She conceals herself. Enter the Page.*]

PASQUALI.

How now, Master Giulio ! Thou'rt impatient.

PAGE.

Zounds, Pasquali ! If thou hadst been a prince, I had not been kept longer at the door.

PASQUALI.

If thou wert of age to relish true philosophy, I could prove to thee that the poet were the better waited for of the two. But what is thy errand ?

PAGE.

A song—I want a new song!

PASQUALI.

To what tune?

PAGE.

To a new tune on the old theme. Could I tell thee a secret without danger now! Hast thou ne'er a cat that will mew it out ?

PASQUALI.

No! not even a wall that has ears. What is thy news?

PAGE.

My mistress Bianca hath lost all taste for my singing !

PASQUALI.

A pin's head might pay for that news.

PAGE.

But, good Pasquali, wilt thou not write me a new song ?

PASQUALI.

Upon what theme ?

PAGE.

Sforza—still Sforza ! But it must be melancholy.

PASQUALI.

Why melancholy ?

PAGE.

Did I not tell thee once in confidence that she loved him ?

PASQUALI.

Ay—and I writ a song in his praise.

PAGE.

I now tell thee in confidence that she hath lost him ; for she is to marry Lionel of Ferrara !

PASQUALI.

Here's news indeed.

PAGE.

It's the Duke's will, and my Lady is grieved to the degree I tell thee. She'll have none of my music. Wilt thou write me the song ?

PASQUALI.

Must it be mournful, say you ?

PAGE.

Ay—as the jug-jug of her nightingale. She's full of tears. Wilt thou write it now ? Shall I hold the ink while thou writest it ?

PASQUALI.

Bless the boy's wits! Dost thou think songs are made like pancakes, by turning the hand over?

PAGE.

Why, is't not in thy head?

PASQUALI.

Ay—it is.

PAGE.

And how long will it take thee to write eight lines upon parchment?

PASQUALI.

Not long—if Minerva were willing.

PAGE.

Shall I have it by vespers then?

PASQUALI.

Ay—if thou wilt leave me presently.

PAGE.

Farewell then! Let it be melancholy, good Pasquali.

[*Exit.*

[*Fiametta comes out.*]

FIAMETTA.

Now must I hurry to my Mistress, ere that monkey-page gets to the palace.

PASQUALI.

Stands he well with her?

FIAMETTA.

If he were her born child, she could not love him more. She fancies the puppy-dog has an eye of her color. Good day, Master Pasquali!

PASQUALI.

Stay! will she marry this Lionel, think you?

FIAMETTA.

Can you know any thing by tears?

PASQUALI.

Not so much by a woman's—but doth your lady weep?

FIAMETTA.

Ay—like an aqueduct!

PASQUALI.

Then it's more like she loves than hates him!

FIAMETTA.

Now, enlighten me that!

PASQUALI.

Thus :—a woman, if she be a lady (for clowns like thee, are of a constitution more dull and reasonable ;)—a lady I say, hath usually in her composition, two spirits—one angelical, the other diabolical. Now, if you stir me up the devil, he will frown—but if you touch me the angel, he will weep! If your lady weep, therefore, it is more like this match hath waked the angel than stirr'd the devil—for I never saw woman yet, who, if her heart

were cross'd, would not play the devil ere she knock'd under!

FIAMETTA.

How canst thou think such brave thoughts on what does not concern thee!

PASQUALI.

Does it concern me if I shall live for ever?

FIAMETTA.

Surely it doth!

PASQUALI.

By what shall I live then?

FIAMETTA.

By faith in the catechism, I think!

PASQUALI.

By poetry, I tell thee! And now digest this paradox! Tho' poetry be full of lies, it is unworthy to be called poetry if it be not true as prophecy.

FIAMETTA.

But how can that be true which is false?

PASQUALI.

I will show thee! Thy lady's page would have a song, now, full of lamentation for Sforza. In it, I should say, the heavens wept—which would be a lie—that the winds whispered mournfully his name, (which would be a lie,) and that life without him were but music out of tune, (which would be a consumed lie!) Yet if she loved

Sforza, see you not that my verses, which are nothing but lies, have a poetic truth. When if she love him not—they are poetically false!

FIAMETTA.

'Tis like thy flatteries then! When thou sayst my cheek is like a peach, it is true, because it hath down upon it, and so hath a peach—yet it is false—because my cheek hath no stone in it!

PASQUALI.

Let me taste the savour of that peach. Thou art wiser than I thought thee.

FIAMETTA.

I must go now.

PASQUALI.

Find me out if she love him! I would fain write no more verses on Sforza—whom I hate that he hath only a brute courage, and no taste for poesy. Now, Lionel's father was Petrarch's friend, and thy lady loving my verses, it were more convenient if she loved Lionel, who would love them too. Go thy ways now.

FIAMETTA.

Farewell, Master Pasquali!

PASQUALI.

Stay—there be rude men in this poor quarter, I will come with thee to the piazza. Come along, Mistress!

SCENE II.

[*The Camp before Milan. The tent of Sforza at the side and watchfires in the distance. Enter Sforza and Brunorio.*]

SFORZA.

Is the guard set?

BRUNORIO.

All set, my Lord!

SFORZA.

And blaze

The watch-fires where I ordered?

BRUNORIO.

Every one.

Hold you your purpose, Sir?

SFORZA.

To-night, at twelve,

I will set on! This fickle Duke of Milan

Has changed for the last time. Brunorio!

BRUNORIO.

You seem disturb'd, Sir.

SFORZA.

I would have to-night

The best blood up that ever rose for Sforza.

Are your spears resolute?

BRUNORIO.

As yourself, my Lord !

SFORZA.

We'll sleep in Milan then. By heaven, I know not
Why I have waited on the changing pleasure
Of this old Duke so long.

BRUNORIO.

Twelve years ago
He promised you his daughter.

SFORZA.

Did he not ?
And every year he has renew'd and broken
This promise of alliance.

BRUNORIO.

Can you hold
Milan against the Florentine, my Lord ?
'Tis said the fair Bianca is betroth'd
To their ally Ferrara ! They will join
Naples against you, and cry out "usurper !"

SFORZA.

Ay—I have thought on't. I'm the *second* Sforza !
The *first* hew'd wood ! *There* lies enough to bar me,
Were I another Cæsar, from authority !
'Tis by this whip I have been driv'n so long—
'Tis by the bait of this old man's alliance

I have for ten years fought the wars of Milan.
They've fool'd me year by year, and still found means
With their curs'd policy, to put me off—
And, by the saints, they've reason. Could I point
The world to such a thread twixt me and Milan
As weaves a spider thro' the summer air,
I'd hang a crown upon it. Once possess'd
Of a fair seat in Lombardy, my spears
Would glisten in St. Mark's!

BRUNORIO.

And thence to Naples!

SFORZA.

Ay—with what speed we might! My brave lieutenant,
You echo my own thought!

[*Enter a sentinel.*]

SENTINEL.

A flag of truce

By torch-light comes from Milan.

[*Enter Sarpellione, in haste.*]

SARPELLIONE.

Noble Sforza!

I've rudely used my privilege to seek you!

SFORZA.

By right of office you are ever welcome.

SARPELLIONE.

If I might speak to you a timely word
In haste and privacy?

SFORZA.

Brunorio, leave us !

SARPELLIONE.

A flag of truce comes presently from Milan
With terms of peace. The Duke would give his daughter
To save his capital.

SFORZA.

The Duke does well !

SARPELLIONE.

You'll wed her then !

SFORZA.

If fairly offer'd me,
Free of all other terms save peace between us,
I'll wed her freely.

SARPELLIONE.

Then I pray you pardon !
You're not the Sforza that should be the son
Of him who made the name !

SFORZA.

Bold words, ambassador !
But you are politic, and speak advisedly.
What bars my marriage with Duke Philip's daughter ?

SARPELLIONE.

Brief—for this herald treads upon my heels—
Bianca was not born in wedlock !

SFORZA.

Well!

SARPELLIONE.

She's been betrothed to other suitors—

SFORZA.

Well!

SARPELLIONE.

Is't well that you can ne'er thro' her inherit
The ducal crown? Is't well to have a wife
Who has made up her mind to other husbands—
Who has been sold to every paltry prince
Twixt Sicily and Venice?

SFORZA.

Is that all?

SARPELLIONE.

No—nor the best of it. *There lives a son,
By the same mother, to the Duke of Milan.*

SFORZA, (seizing him by the arm.)

Said you a son?

SARPELLIONE.

A son!—and—had I time—

SFORZA.

Without there! Pray the embassy from Milan
To grant me but a moment.

[*Turning to Sarpellone.*]

Is it sure ?

SARPELLIONE.

Upon the honor of my royal master,
Who'll make it good.

SFORZA.

Have you authority
For what you say ?

SARPELLIONE.

In court or camp, Alfonso
Will prove this story true. His mother fled,
As the world knows—in peril of her life—
To Naples.

SFORZA.

From the jealousy of the Duke—
I well remember.

SARPELLIONE.

Ere he could demand her
From young Alfonso, newly king, she died ;
But in her throes brought prematurely forth
A son ; whom, fearing for his life, she hid,
And rear'd him, ever like a Prince, till now.

SFORZA.

Some fourteen years.

SARPELLIONE.

Scarce that—but he is forward,
And feels his blood already.

SFORZA.

Say he does—
What make you out of it to change my purpose?

SARPELLIONE.

Seeing you cannot thrive by conquering Milan,
Which Milan's allies will pluck back from you
To put the prince upon his father's seat—
My royal master wishes you forewarned.

SFORZA.

He's kind—if that is all!

SARPELLIONE.

He'd make a friend
Of the best sword in Italy.

SFORZA.

What scheme
Lies under this?

SARPELLIONE.

No scheme—but your own glory!
Your star stoops to the south. Alfonso's army
Gathers at Capua to war on Florence!
(*More earnestly.*) He'll add Ravenna to your marquisate
For but a thousand spears!

SFORZA.

I'll take Ravenna
Without his leave! Admit the herald there!
No, Count! your policy has overshot!
The King Alfonso needs no spears of mine—
But he would have them farther off from Milan—
A blind mole would see that!

SARPELLIONE.

My Lord! My Lord!

SFORZA.

Hear me, Sarpellione! I have been
Too long the sport of your fine policy!
With promises of power and fair alliance
I've fought for every prince in Italy—
And *against* all, in turn; now leagued with Venice
To beat back Florence from the Brenta; now
With Florence against Milan; then with Milan
To drive the Tuscan home again, and all
For my *own glory*, by some politic reason.
I'll have a place, or I'll be in the track on't—
Where the poor honor that my hand may pluck
Shall be well garner'd. By Visconti's daughter
I set my foot in Milan. My poor laurels,
Such as they are, shall root there!—and, by heaven,
I'll find a way to make their branches flourish!
Call in the herald, there!

SARPELLIONE.

But Lionel,
Prince of Ferrara, whom Bianca loves—

SFORZA.

Glory has been my mistress many years
And will suffice me still. If it should chance
Bianca loves another, 'tis an evil
To wed with *me*, which I will recompense
With chainless freedom after. In my glory
She'll find a bright veil that will hide all errors,
Save from the heart that pardons her.

SARPELLIONE.

Farewell!

You'll hear o' the young Prince soon!

SFORZA.

I'll never wrong him—
If there be one!—Our stars will rise together!
There's room enough!

[*Exit Sarpellione and enter Rossano.*]

Fair welcome, brave Rossano!
I know your news.

ROSSANO.

The Duke sends greeting to you—

SFORZA.

And offers me his daughter—is't not so?

ROSSANO.

Seeing your preparations as I came
I marvel you anticipate so well!

SFORZA.

A bird i' th' air brings news, they say—but this
Came by a serpent. How's the spear-wound now,
You took for me at Pisa? Brave Rossano!
We'll break a lance once more in company.
It warms my blood to find myself again
O' the same side. Come out in th' open air!
We'll talk more freely, as we used to do,
Over a watch-fire. Come out, old comrade!

[*Exeunt Sforza and Rossano.*]

SCENE III.

[*The apartment of Bianca. Fiametta embroidering,
and the Page thrumming his guitar.*]

PAGE.

I'd give my greyhound now—gold collar and silken
leash—to know why the Duke sent for my lady.

FIAMETTA.

Would you, Master Curiosity?

PAGE.

Mistress Pert, I would—and thy acquaintance into the bargain.

FIAMETTA.

Better keep the goods you come honestly by. I would you knew as well how your mistress came by *you*.

PAGE.

I came to her from heaven—like her taste for my music. (*Hums a tune.*)

FIAMETTA.

Did you! do they make sacks in heaven?

PAGE.

There's a waiting woman's question for you! Why sacks?

FIAMETTA.

Because I think you came in one, like a present of a puppy-dog.

PAGE.

Silence, dull pin-woman! here comes my mistress!
[*Takes off his cap as Bianca enters. She walks across the stage without heeding her attendants.*]

BIANCA.

To marry Sforza!

My dream come true! my long, long cherish'd dream!
The star come out of heaven that I had worshipp'd!

The paradise I built with soaring fancy
And filled with rapture like a honey-bee
Dropp'd from the clouds at last ! Am I awake ?—
Am I awake, dear Giulio ?

PAGE.

(*Half advancing to her.*) Noble Mistress !

BIANCA.

Thank God they speak to me ! It is no dream !
It was *this* hand my father took to tell me—
It was with *these* lips that I tried to speak—
It was *this* heart that beat its giddy prison
As if th' exulting joy new-sprung within it
Would out and fill the world !
. Wed him to-morrow !
So suddenly a wife ! Will it seem modest,
With but twelve hours of giddy preparation
To come a bride to church ! Will he remember
I was ten years ago affianced to him ?
I have had time to think on't ! Oh, I'll tell him—
When I dare speak I'll tell him—how I've lov'd him !
And day and night dream'd of him, and thro' all
The changing wars treasured the solemn troth
Broke by my father ! If he listens kindly,
I'll tell him how I fed my eyes upon him
In Venice at his triumph—when he walk'd
Like a descended god beside the Doge,
Who thanked him for his victories, and the people,

From every roof and balcony, by thousands
Shouted out "Sforza! Live the gallant Sforza!"
I was a child then—but I felt my heart
Grow, in one hour, to woman!

PAGE.

Would it please you
To hear my new song, Lady?

BIANCA.

No, good Giulio!
My spirits are too troubled now for music.
Get thee to bed! Yet stay! hast heard the news?

PAGE.

Is't from the camp?

BIANCA.

Ay—Sforza's taken prisoner!

PAGE.

I'm vex'd for that!

BIANCA.

Why vex'd?

PAGE.

In four years more
I shall bear sword and lance. There'll be no Sforza
To kill when I'm a man! Who took him, Lady?

BIANCA.

A blind boy, scarcely bigger than yourself;

And gave him, bound, to me! In brief, dear Giulio!
Not to perplex those winking eye-lids more,
The wars are done, and Sforza weds to-morrow
Your happy mistress!

PAGE.

Sforza! We shall have
A bonfire then!

BIANCA.

Ay—twenty!

PAGE.

And you'll live
Here in the palace, and have masks and gambols
The year round, will you not?

BIANCA.

My pretty minion,
You know not yet what love is! Love's a miser,
That plucks his treasure from the prying world
And grudges e'en the eye of daylight on it!
Another's look is theft—another's touch
Robs it of all its value. Love conceives
No paradise but such as Eden was
With *two* hearts beating in it.

[*Leaves the Page, and walks thoughtfully away.*]

Oh, I'll build
A home upon some green and flowery isle
In the lone lakes, where we will use our empire

Only to keep away the gazing world.
The purple mountains and the glassy waters
Shall make a hush'd pavilion with the sky,
And we two in the midst will live alone,
Counting the hours by stars and waking birds,
And jealous but of sleep! To bed, dear Giulio!
And wake betimes.

PAGE.

Good night, my dearest Lady!

BIANCA.

To bed, Fiametta! I have busy thoughts,
That needs will keep me waking.

FIAMETTA.

Good night, Lady.

BIANCA.

Good night, good night! The moon has fellowship
For moods like mine. I'll forth upon the terrace,
And watch her while my heart beats warm and fast.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

[*The square of Milan. The front of the cathedral on the right. People kneeling round the steps, and the organ heard within. Enter Pasquali and Fiametta in haste.*]

FIAMETTA.

Now, Master Pasquali! said I not we should be too late?

PASQUALI.

Truly, there seems no room!

FIAMETTA.

And I her first serving-woman! If it were my own wedding I should not grieve more to have miss'd it. You would keep scribbling, scribbling, and I knew it was past twelve.

PASQUALI.

Consider, Mistress Fiametta! I had no news of this marriage till the chimes began; and the epithalamium must be writ! I were shamed else, being the bard of Milan.

FIAMETTA.

The what, of Milan ?

PASQUALI.

The bard, I say ! Come aside, and thou shalt be consoled. I'll read thee my epithalamium.

FIAMETTA.

Is it something to ask money of the bridegroom ?

PASQUALI.

Dost thou think I would beg ?

FIAMETTA.

Nay—thou'rt very poor !

[PASQUALI.

Look thee, Mistress Fiametta ! that's a vulgar error, thou hadst best be rid of. I, whom thou callest poor, am richer than the Duke.

FIAMETTA.

Now if thou'rt not out of thy ten senses, the Virgin bless us.

PASQUALI.

I'll prove it even to thy dull apprehension. Answer me truly. How many meals eats the Duke in a day ?

FIAMETTA.

Three, I think, if he be well.

PASQUALI.

So does Pasquali! How much covering has he?

FIAMETTA.

Nay—what keeps him warm.

PASQUALI.

So has Pasquali! How much money carries he on his person?

FIAMETTA.

None, I think. He is a Duke, and needs none.

PASQUALI.

Even so Pasquali! He is a Poet, and needs none. What good does him the gold in his treasury?

FIAMETTA.

He thinks of it.

PASQUALI.

So can Pasquali! What pleasure hath he in his soldiers?

FIAMETTA.

They keep him safe in his palace.

PASQUALI.

So they do Pasquali in his chamber. Thus far, thou'lt allow, my state is as good as his—and better—for I can think of his gold, and sleep safe by his soldiers, yet have no care of them.

FIAMETTA.

I warrant he has troubled thoughts.

PASQUALI.

Thou sayst well. Answer me once more, and I'll prove to thee in what I am richer. Thou'st ne'er heard, I dare swear, of imagination.

FIAMETTA.

Is't a Pagan nation or a Christian?

PASQUALI.

Stay—I'll convey it to thee by a figure. What were the value of thy red stockings over black, if it were always night?

FIAMETTA.

None.

PASQUALI.

What were beauty if it were always dark?

FIAMETTA.

The same as none.

PASQUALI.

What were green leaves better than brown—diamonds better than pebbles—gold better than brass—if it were always dark?

FIAMETTA.

No better, truly.

PASQUALI.

Then the shining of the sun, in a manner, dyes your stockings, creates beauty, makes gold and diamonds, and paints the leaves green ?

FIAMETTA.

I think it doth.

PASQUALI.

Now mark ! There be gems in the earth, qualities in the flowers, creatures in the air, the Duke ne'er dreams of. There be treasuries of gold and silver, temples and palaces of glorious work, rapturous music, and feasts the gods sit at—and all seen only by a sun, which, to the Duke, is black as Erebus.

FIAMETTA.

Lord ! Lord ! Where is it, Master Pasquali ?

PASQUALI.

In my head ! (*Fiametta discovers signs of fear.*) All these gems, treasuries, palaces, and fairy harmonies I see by the imagination I spoke of. Am I not richer now ?

FIAMETTA, (*retreating from him.*)

The Virgin help us ! He thinks there's a sun in his head ! I thought to have married him, but he's mad !

[*She falls to weeping.*]

[*The cathedral is flung open, and the organ plays louder. The bridal procession comes out of church and passes across the stage. As they pass Pasquali, he offers his epithalamium to Sforza.*]

SFORZA.

What have we here—petitions ?

BIANCA.

Nay, my Lord !

Pasquali's not a beggar. You shall read
Something inventive here ! He's a clear fancy,
And sings your praises well. Good chamberlain !
Bring him with honor to the palace ! Please you,
My Lord, wilt on !

PAGE, (*to Pasquali.*)

You'll come to the feast now, wont you ?
We'll sit together, and have songs and stories,
And keep the merriest end on't !

[*As the procession passes off, Sarpellione plucks Pasquali by the sleeve, and retains him.*]

SARPELLIONE.

A fair bride, sir !

PASQUALI.

What would you, noble Count ?

SARPELLIONE.

The bridegroom, now,

Should be a poet, like yourself, to know
The worth of such a jewel!

PASQUALI.

Haply so—
But we are staying from the marriage feast—

SARPELLIONE.

One word! (*Pulls him aside.*) Have you ambition?

PASQUALI.

Like the wings
Upon a marble cherub—always spread,
But fastened to a body of such weight
'Twill never rise till doomsday. I would drink
Sooner than talk of it!—Come on! my Lord!

SARPELLIONE.

Signor Pasquali—I have mark'd you oft
For a shrewd, rapid wit. As one who looks
Oft on the sun, there needs no tedious care
Lest the light break too suddenly upon you.
Is it not so?

PASQUALI.

Say on!

SARPELLIONE.

You know how Naples
Has over it a sky all poetry.

PASQUALI.

I know it well.

SARPELLIONE.

The radiant Giovanna
Cherish'd Bocaccio and Petrarch there,
And 'tis the quality of the air they breath'd—
Alphonso feels it ! Brief and to the point !
My royal master sends for you. He'd have
A galaxy around him !

PASQUALI.

Noble Count !

[*Enter Page.*]

PAGE.

I'm sent to bid you to the feast, sirs !

SARPELLIONE.

Go !

We'll follow straight. [*Exit Page.*]

This leaden-headed soldier
Slights you, I see—He took you for a beggar !

PASQUALI.

Humph ! 'tis his wedding day, and I forgive him !

SARPELLIONE.

You're used to wrong, I knew.

PASQUALI.

To-day, my lord,
I'm bent upon a feast—wake not a devil
To mar my appetite !

SARPELLIONE.

One single word!

This brainless spear-head would be Duke of Milan.

PASQUALI.

What! while the Duke lives!

SARPELLIONE.

While the Duke's *son* lives,
For there *is* one—I'll prove it when you will—
And he will murder him to take his crown.

PASQUALI.

How know you that?

SARPELLIONE.

Alphonso, king of Naples,
Would have this usurpation and this murder
In time prevented.

PASQUALI.

How!

SARPELLIONE.

By Sforza's death.

There's no way else—but 'tis a dangerous theme
To talk on here—come out o' the way a little,
And you shall have such reasons for the deed—

PASQUALI, (*flings him from him with contempt.*)

What "deed!" Dost take me for a murderer?

My Lord! I'm poor. I have a thirst for honors
Such as you offered me but now, that burns
Like fire upon my lips—I could be tortur'd
Thro' twenty deaths to leave a name behind me.
But nay, I prate—I'll turn not out to *thee*
The golden inside of a soul of honor—
(*Leaving him.*) When next you want a hand for a bad
deed,
Look to your *equals*—there are those *beneath* you
Who, from their darkling wells, see guiding-stars
Far o'er *your* head, my Lord! [*Exit.*]

SARPELLIONE.

Such men as this
Do not betray e'en villains! I shall find
Another and a fitter. To the feast now!
And watch my time and means. [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

[*An ante-room, with a feast seen beyond. Enter Sforza and Rossano.*]

ROSSANO.

I've a new culverin
Invented here by the Duke's armorer;
Will you walk forth?

SFORZA.

Most willingly. Within there!

My helmet!

[*Enter Bianca.*]

BIANCA.

Is there fresh alarm, my Lord?

You would not go abroad?

[*She takes the helmet from the page as he brings it in.*]

SFORZA.

A little way, sweet

To look at some new arms.

BIANCA.

To-morrow, surely,

Will do as well. Here are some loving verses

Writ on your marriage!

ROSSANO.

I've the gonfalon

Your father gave me at the siege of Parma.

The rags wave yet!

SFORZA.

I'd rather see a thread on't

Than feast a hundred years!

BIANCA.

My Lord, wil't please you

Come in, and hear the verses? There's a wine
You did not taste, grown on Vesuvius;
Pray you come in!

ROSSANO.

I've, in my tent, the sword
Your father pluck'd from a retreating soldier
To head the fight at Pisa. 'Tis well hack'd!

SFORZA.

I'll come, Rossano!

(*To Bianca.*) Nay, sweet! by your leave

(*Takes his helmet.*)

We'll go abroad a little! You shall see us
Betimes at supper. Keep the revels toward!
We'll taste your wine anon. Come, brave Rossano!

[*They go out. Bianca looks after them thoughtfully
a few moments, and then walks back slowly to the
banquetting room.*]

SCENE III.

[*The ramparts at night. Enter Sforza and Rossano.*]

ROSSANO.

She's loving in her nature, and methought
Seem'd griev'd when you came forth!

SFORZA.

I should have thought so,
But that I had some private information
She lov'd another !

ROSSANO.

You're perhaps abused !

SFORZA.

Nay—nay—how should she love me ? I'm well on
To my meridian, see you !—a rough soldier—
Who never learn'd the courtly phrase of love.
And she—the simplest maiden in a cot,
Is not more tender-eyed, nor has a heart
Apter to know love's lesson ere 'tis time.
She's loved ere now, Rossano !

ROSSANO.

Haply so—

Yet be not rude too rashly.

SFORZA.

Rude ! I'll make
This forced link that policy puts on her
Loose as a smoke-curl ! She shall know no master,
And be no slave for me !

ROSSANO.

You'll not neglect her !

SFORZA.

The sun of woman's world is love, Rossano !

When that sun sets, if no unpitying cloud
Trouble her sky, there rises oftentimes
A crescent moon of memory, whose light
Makes the dark pathway clear again. Bianca's
May have gone down for me ! I'll be no cloud
To mar the moon as well.

ROSSANO.

Stand by—there comes
A footfall this way. (*They stand aside.*)

[*Enter Pasquali, hiccupping, and talking to himself.*]

PASQUALI.

That wine was grown on Vesuvius. That's the reason it makes such an eruption. If it breaks out o' the top o' my head now—as I think it will—for it gets hotter and hotter—I shall know if wit be in the brains or the belly.

ROSSANO, (*aside.*)

Stay—my Lord ! This is Pasquali, whose verses Bianca sometimes sings to her lute. Ten to one now but you may gather from his drunkenness if Bianca loves another. (*Rossano comes forward.*) Good even, Master Pasquali !

PASQUALI.

That's an every day phrase—this is holiday !

ROSSANO.

A merry good even then !

PASQUALI.

Ay—that's better! For we're all merry—except the bride. And that's the way of it.

ROSSANO.

What's the way of it?

PASQUALI.

See here! Who is it that never weeps at a funeral?

ROSSANO.

You shall tell me.

PASQUALI.

The dead man, that hath most cause.

ROSSANO.

And what hath that to do with a bridal?

PASQUALI.

A great deal. Of all people at a bridal, who should be most merry? Why, the bride! now I have just left a bride that is sad enough for a funeral.

ROSSANO.

For what cause, think you?

PASQUALI.

There are some things which can have but one cause. There's but one cause for drunkenness, and there's but one for grief on a wedding-day.

ROSSANO.

And what's that?

PASQUALI.

Wine—causes drunkenness!

ROSSANO.

And what causes grief in a bride?

PASQUALI.

Want of love for the bridegroom.

ROSSANO.

How know you that, sir?

PASQUALI.

Listen to in-spi-ra-tion!

“When first young Lionel did catch mine eye,
“Sforza, the valiant, pass'd unheeded by!”

ROSSANO.

Villain! these are thine own lying verses!

PASQUALI, (*pulling out his sword.*)

The figures of speech are lies of verse. But if thou sayest it is a lie that Bianca loves Lionel best, *thou liest in prose, and so, come on! (Attacks Rossano, and Sforza comes forward, and strikes up their swords.)*

SFORZA.

Get home, thou drunkard! Come away, Rossano.
He writes what's palatable, and but echoes

That which is rung at court. She loved this Prince—
Sarpellone told me so before.

We'll to the field and our old mistress, glory.

Come on—we'll talk of battles and forget her.

[*Exeunt.*]

PASQUALI.

'Fighting's not my vocation ; but I have an itching that
way, and I'll after him. Halloo ! Were there two men ?
I think there were two. The last man called me a drunk-
ard ! That's no offence ! a poet may be a drunkard ! But
"villain !" that's incompatible, and must be prick'd back.
Halloo !

[*Exit.*]

SCENE IV.

[*Bianca's chamber at midnight. She sits on a couch
in a white undress, and Sforza beside her in his
armor.*]

BIANCA.

Dost think this ring a pretty one, my Lord ?

SFORZA.

Ay, 'tis a pretty ring ! I have one here

Marancio gave me—Giacomo Marancio.

The ring his wife sent—but you've heard the story ?

BIANCA.

I think I never heard it.

SFORZA.

She's a woman

The heart grows but to speak of. She was held
A hostage by the Milanese, (I pray you
Pardon the mention,) when, twixt them and me
Marancio held a pass. Her life was threatened
If by his means I crossed the Adige. She—
(Brave heart! I warm to speak of her!) found means
To send to him this ring; wherein is writ
"He who loves most, loves honor best." You'll see it
Here o' th' inside.

BIANCA.

Did you see this Lady?

SFORZA.

I hazarded a battle three days after
With perilous odds, only to bring her off—
And would have sold my life for't.

BIANCA.

Did you *see* her?

SFORZA.

I gave her to Marancio when I took
The ring of him.

BIANCA.

My Lord! speak you so warmly
Of any other woman?

SFORZA, (*rising and taking his helmet.*)

Nay, I know not.

There are some qualities that woman have
Which are less worthy, but which warm us more
Than speaking of their virtues. I remember
The fair Giovanna in her pride at Naples.
Gods! what a light enveloped her! She left
Little to shine in history—but her beauty
Was of that order that the universe
Seem'd govern'd by her motion. Men look'd on her
As if her next step would arrest the world;
And as the sea-bird seems to rule the wave
He rides so buoyantly, all things around her—
The glittering army, the spread gonfalon
The pomp, the music, the bright sun in heaven—
Seem'd glorious by her leave.

BIANCA, (*rising and going to the window.*)

There's emulation
Of such sweet praise, my Lord! Did you not hear
The faint note of a nightingale?

SFORZA.

More like
A far heard clarion, methought! They change
The sentinels perchance. 'Tis time Rossano
Awaits me on the ramparts.

BIANCA.

Not to-night!

Go not abroad again to-night, my Lord !

SFORZA.

For a brief hour, sweet ! The old soldier loves
To gossip of the fields he's lost and won,
And I, no less, to listen. Get to bed !
I'll follow you anon.

[Exit Sforza.

BIANCA.

He does not love me !

I never dream'd of this ! To be his bride
Was all the Heav'n I look'd for ! Not to love me
When I have been ten years affianced to him !—
When I have liv'd for him—shut up my heart,
With every pulse and hope, for his use only—
Worshipp'd—oh God ! idolatrously lov'd him !

.....
Why has he sought to marry me ? Why still
Renew the broken pledge my father made him ?
Why, for ten years, with war and policy,
Strive for my poor alliance ?

..... He *must* love me,
Or I shall break my heart ! I never had
One other hope in life ! I never link'd
One thought, but to this chain ! I have no blood—
No breath—no being—separate from Sforza !
Nothing has any other name ! The sun
Shined like his smile—the lightning was his glory—

The night his sleep, and the hush'd moon watch'd o'er
him ;—

Stars writ his name—his breath hung on the flowers—

Music had no voice but to say *I love him*,

And life no future, but his love for me!

Whom does he love? Marancio's wife? He prais'd

Only her courage! Queen Giovanna's beauty?

'Tis dust these many years! There is no sign

He loves another; and report said ever

His *glory* was his mistress. *Can he love?*

Shame on the doubt! 'Twas written in the ring

"He who loves *most* loves honor best"—and Sforza

Is made too like a god to lack a heart.

And so, I breathe again! To make him love me

Is all my life now! to pry through his nature,

And find his heart out. *That's* wrapt in his glory!

I'll feed his glory then! He praised Giovanna

That she was royal and magnificent—

Ay—that's well thought on, too! How should an eye,

Dazzled with war and warlike pomp like Sforza's,

Find pleasure in simplicity like mine!

(*Looks at her dress.*)

I'm a Duke's daughter, and I'll wear the look on't!

Unlock my jewels and my costly robes,

And while I keep his show-struck eye upon me,

Watch for a golden opportunity

To build up his renown!

. And so farewell

The gentle world I've liv'd in! Farewell all
My visions of a world for two hearts only—
Sforza's and mine! If I outlive this change,
So brief and yet so violent within me,
I'll come back in my dreams, oh childish world!
If not—a broken heart blots out remembrance.

[*Exit into her bridal chamber, which is seen beyond
on opening the door.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

[*An ante-chamber of the palace. Brunorio leaning sullenly on his sword by the door. Enter Sarpellione.*]

SARPELLIONE.

What's this?—the brave Brunorio turned lackey?

BRUNORIO.

Nay, Count! I wait my turn.

SARPELLIONE.

If a civilian

May have a judgment of a soldier's duty,
You're out of place, sir! This is not the camp!
You're not on guard here! There's a difference
Twixt patience at your post, and kicking heels
In my Lord's antechamber!

BRUNORIO.

By the saints

My own thought, noble Count! As you came in
I brooded on't.

SARPELLIONE, (*aside.*)

(This blockhead may be turn'd
To a shrewd use now! I have mark'd his brows
Blackening upon Rossano, who usurps
His confidence with Sforza. Could I seize
The lightning in this jealous thunder-cloud—
I'll see the depth on't.) Sforza *knows* you're *here*?

BRUNORIO.

I had a message by a varlet page,
Who bid me wait here.

SARPELLIONE.

By a page? Sacristie!
Fair treatment for a soldier! Say, Brunorio!
What was't I heard of the Pope's standard-bearer
Clove to the wrist?

BRUNORIO.

Heard you of *that*, my Lord?
You see the weapon, here!

SARPELLIONE.

Was't thine, i' faith?
I thought *promotion* had been won with service!
Was't thou, indeed? I heard the King Alfonso
Say 'twas the best blow and the bravest follow'd
He'd know in his time. How it came to his ears
I know not—but he made the court ring with it!

BRUNORIO.

The King?

SARPELLIONE.

How long since thou wast made lieutenant?

BRUNORIO.

Five years come March!

SARPELLIONE.

Zounds! how this peasant's son
Treads merit in the dust! Sforza keeps back
His betters, brave Brunorio!

(Rossano passes out.)

Ay—there!

That man cuts off your sunshine, or I know
Nothing of courts! I, that have no part in it,
Have mark'd how you are slighted for Rossano!
Forgive my touching on't! 'Tis my respect
For a brave soldier makes me speak so freely.
But were I of your counsel—

BRUNORIO.

Noble Count,

My heart speaks thro' your lips. Since this Rossano
Has had my Lord's ear, I've been thrust aside
Like a disgrac'd hound.

SARPELLIONE.

Frankly, brave Brunorio!

And between us,—I've heard you lightly mentioned
By this ungrateful Sforza!

BRUNORIO.

How, my Lord?

SARPELLIONE.

I would not tell you but to serve you in it—
He told Rossano, there, that you had strength,
And struck a sharp blow—and so did an axe!
But for your brains—and then he tossed his head—
You've seen the scorn upon his lip?

BRUNORIO.

Curse on him!

I've a sharp blow left yet—and brains enough
To find a time to strike it! Did you say
Alfonso had spoke well of me, my Lord?

SARPELLIONE.

So well, that, on my own authority—
If you'd take service with a better master—
You're Captain from this hour.

BRUNORIO.

My Lord! So promptly

I take your offer, that your commendations
Will find no swifter bearer than myself
To King Alfonso.

SARPELLIONE.

Stay—I'm not just now
On the best terms with Sforza, and you'll see

With half a glance, that while he's here in Milan
His best sword could not leave him for Alfonso,
But it would throw suspicion upon me,
And touch my credit here. I'll write your warrant,
Which you shall keep, and use it when you please.
But for the present shut your bosom up,
And bear your wrongs. Sforza awaits you now—
Go in. I'll see you as you pass again!

[*Exit Brunorio.*]

He's a fit tool! This o'er-ambitious Sforza
Must not be Duke—and if I fret this cur
Till he will tear his master, why, 'twill save
A worthier hand the trouble on't.

[*Exit Sarpellione.*]

SCENE II.

[*Sforza discovered sitting thoughtfully in his apartment. The Page curiously examining his sword.*]

SFORZA, (*yawning.*)

This is dull work!

PAGE.

My Lord, will't please you, teach me
A trick of fence?

SFORZA.

Ay—willingly! Hast thou
A weapon in that needle-case of thine?

PAGE, (*drawing.*)

A weapon! If I had your legs to stand on
I'd give you all the odds twixt it and yours!
Look at that blade! (*Bends it.*) Damascus!

[*Sforza smiles, and unbuckles his scabbard.*]

By the gods

You shall not laugh at me! I'll give you odds,—
With any thing to stand on!

SFORZA.

Nay—I'll sit—

And you shall touch me if you can! Come on!
And see I do not rap you o'er the cockscomb!

PAGE.

Have at you fairly! Mind! for I'm in earnest!
(*They fence.*)

SFORZA.

One—two—well thrust, by Jupiter! Again!
One—two!

PAGE, (*makes a lunge.*)

Three! there you have it!

SFORZA, (*starting up.*)

Zounds!

This is no play.

PAGE.

What ! does the needle prick ?
(*Wipes it with his handkerchief.*)

SFORZA.

'Tis a Damascus if thou wilt ! I'll laugh
No more at it or thee. Come here, thou varlet !
Where got thy mistress such a ready hand
As thou art ?

PAGE, (*fencing with the chair.*)

From an eagle's nest, my Lord !

SFORZA.

I'll swear to it ! Thou hast the eagle's eye !
But tell me—what brave gentleman of Milan
Has thy blood in his veins ?

PAGE.

I'm not of Milan.
Sarpellione brought me here from Naples.

SFORZA.

Thou'rt not his child. I'll answer for't.

PAGE.

Not I !
I hate him ! Come ! Wilt try another pass ?

SFORZA.

Stay ! is the count thy Master then ?

PAGE.

My Master?

He's an old snake! But I'll say this for him,
Were I a royal prince—(as I may be—
Who knows!)—Sarpellone could not treat me
With more becoming honor.

SFORZA, (*starting up suddenly.*)

What if this
Should be the Duke's son that he told me of?
Come hither, sir! What know you of your father?
(*Aside.*) ('Tis the Visconti's lip!)

PAGE.

I'll tell you all

I know, my Lord. Alfonso sent me here,
Five years ago, in quality of page.
I was to serve my Lady and no other,
And to be gently nurtured. The King gave me
A smart new feather—bade me bear myself
Like a young Prince at Milan—

SFORZA, (*starting away from him.*)

It is he!—

Princely in spirit, and Visconti's impress
On every feature! He'll be Duke of Milan!

PAGE.

Heard you the Duke was worse to-day, my Lord?

SFORZA.

What Duke?

PAGE.

Nay, sir! you ought to know what Duke!
I heard the Doctor say you'd wear his crown
In three days. Never say I told you of it!
He whisper'd it to old Sarpellione,
Who—

SFORZA.

What?

PAGE.

Look'd daggers at him!

SFORZA, (*aside.*)

(Now the devil

Plucks at my soul indeed! If the Duke die,
The crown lies in the gift of my new wife,
And I were Duke as sure as he were dead—
But for this boy!

(*Walks rapidly up and down.*)

I'd set my foot in Venice
In half a year!—Ferrara—then Bologna—
Florence—and thence to Naples! I'd be King
Of Italy before their mourning's threadbare—
But for this boy!

(*The Page still fences with the chair.*)

. I'd found a dynasty!—

Be second of the name—but the first king—
And there should go, e'en with the news, to France,
A bold ambassador from one Francesco,—
Sforza by birth and king of Italy—

But for this boy !

. I would he were a man !

I would an army barr'd me from the crown,
Sooner than this boy's right ! But he might die !
He might have run upon my sword just now !
'Twere natural,—and so it were to fall
In playing with't, and bleed to death unheard,
From a ripp'd vein. That would be natural !
He might have died in *many ways*, and *I*
Have had no part in't.

PAGE.

Will you fence, my Lord ?

SFORZA, (*clutches his sword, and suddenly sheaths it,
and walks from him. Aside.*)

(Get thee gone, devil ! After all his glory
Shall Sforza be the murderer of a child !)
No—No ! I'll not fence with thee ! Go and play !
I—I—I—(*turns from him.*)

Stay ! shall such a grain of sand
As a boy's life, check Sforza's bold ambition !
I, who have hewn down thousands in a day
For but the play on't—I, upon whose hand
Sat slaughter, like a falcon, to let loose

At all that flew above me! I—whose conscience
Carries the reckoning of unnumber'd souls
Sped unto Hell or Heaven, for this ambition!—
Shall I mar all now with a woman's pity
For a fair stripling!

(Draws his sword, and the Page, who has been regarding him attentively, comes up, and pulls him by the sleeve.)

PAGE.

Look you here, my Lord!

If I have harm'd you—for you seem so angry
I *think* I have—more than I meant to do—
Take my own sword, and wound me back again!
I'll not cry out—and when you see me bleed,
You'll pardon me that I was so unhappy
As to have chanc'd to wound you!

(Kneels, opens his bosom, and offers his sword-hilt to Sforza.)

SFORZA.

Angels keep me!

Give me thy hand, boy!

(Looks at him a moment, and passes his hand across his eyes.)

PAGE.

You'll forgive me, sir?

Letting of blood—*when done in fair play, mind you!*
Has no offence in't.

SFORZA.

Leave me now, sweet boy!

I'll see thee at the feast to-night! Farewell!

(Page kisses his hand, and exit.)

Shade of my father! If from Heaven thou look'st

Upon the bright inheritance of glory

I took from thee—pluck from my tortur'd soul

These thoughts of Hell—and keep me worthy of thee!

*(Walks up and down thoughtfully, and then presses
the crucifix to his lips.)*

As I am true to honor and that child,

Help me, just Heaven!

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.

[A bridal feast seen through a glass door in the rear of the stage. Enter from the banquetting room, Bianca, drest with great magnificence, followed by Sforza, Rossano, Brunorio, and Sarpellione. A raised throne at the side. Music heard till the door is closed.]

BIANCA.

They who love stillness follow us! The brain
Grows giddy with the never-wearying dance,

And music's pause is sweet as its beginning.
Shut the doors, Giulio! Sarpellione ! enter!
You're welcome to Trophonius' cave! We'll hold
The Court of Silence, and I'll play the Queen.
My brave lord, you shall doff that serious air,
And be court favorite—sit you at our feet!

SFORZA.

Too envious a place and office both!
I'll sit here with Rossano. Honor's flower—
That lifts a bold head in the world—at court,
Looks for the lily's hiding-place.

SARPELLIONE, (*aside.*)

(What trick

Lies in this new humility.) The lily
Is lowly born, and knows its place, my Lord!

BIANCA.

Yet is it sought with pains while the rose withers !

SARPELLIONE.

The rose lifts to the sun its flowering tree,
And all its parts are honor'd—while the lily
Upon one fragile stem rears all its beauty—
And its coarse family of leaves are left
To lie on th' earth they cling to.

SFORZA, (*to Rossano, with whom he has been conversing
apart.*)

(I've sure news

He was worse yesterday !)

(*Bianca rising with dignity, and descending from the ducal chair.*)

BIANCA.

Now, since the serpent
Mised our mother, never was fair truth
So subtly turned to error. If the rose
Were born a lily, and, by force of heart
And eagerness for light, grew tall and fair,
'Twere a true type of the first fiery soul
That makes a low name honorable. They
Who take it by inheritance alone—
Adding no brightness to it—are like stars
Seen in the ocean, that were never there
But for the bright originals in Heaven!

SARPELLIONE, (*sneeringly.*)

Rest to the gallant soul of the *first* Sforza!

BIANCA.

Amen! but triple glory to the second!
I have a brief tale for thine ear, Ambassador!

SARPELLIONE.

I listen, Lady!

BIANCA.

Mark the moral, sir!
An eagle once from the Euganean hills
Soared bravely to the sky. (*To Sf.*) (Wilt please my Lord

List to my story ?) In his giddy track
Scarce mark'd by them who gazed upon the first,
Follow'd a new-fledged eaglet, fast and well.¹
Upward they sped, and all eyes on their flight
Gazed with admiring awe, when, suddenly,
The parent bird, struck by a thunderbolt,
Dropp'd lifeless thro' the air. The eaglet paused,
And hung upon his wings ; and as his sire
Plashed in the far-down wave, men look'd to see him
Flee to his nest affrighted !

SFORZA, (*with great interest.*)

Did he so ?

BIANCA.

My noble lord—he had a monarch's heart !
He wheel'd a moment in mid air, and shook
Proudly his royal wings, and then, right on,
With crest uplifted and unwavering flight,
Sped to the sun's eye, straight and gloriously.

PAGE.

Lady—is that true ?

BIANCA.

Ay—men call those eagles
Sforza the First and Second !

(*The bell tolls, and enter a messenger.*)

MESSENGER.

Pardon, Madam !

For my sad news ! your royal Father's dead !

BIANCA, (*aside, with great energy.*)

(Sforza'll be Duke !)

(*Turning to the messenger.*)

Died he in much pain, know you ?

MESSENGER.

Madam—

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(The crown is mine ! He will remember

The crown was *mine*.)

(*Turns to the messenger.*)

Sent he for any one

In his extremity ?

MESSENGER.

Most honor'd Madam—

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(Ingratitude is not the lion's fault—

He cannot hate me when I make him royal !

It would be monstrous if he did not love me !)

(*To the messenger.*)

Said you my father sent for me ?

MESSENGER.

No ! Madam,

He died as he had lived, unseen of any

Save his physician !

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(Sforza must be crowned

And then our mourning will shut out the world !

He'll be alone with me and his new glory—

All royal, and all *mine* !) (*To Sf.*) Please you, my Lord,

Dismiss the revellers ! My father's dead !

(*Aside.*) (There are no more Viscontis—Sforza's children

Shall now be Duke of Milan ! Think on that !

He'll think on't, and his heart will come down to me,

Or there's no truth in nature !) (*To Sf.*) My brave Lord !

Shall we go in ?

SFORZA.

Go you in first ! (*hands her in*) Rossano

Will forth with me, to see the funeral

Fitly arrang'd.

BIANCA.

You'll come back soon, my Lord !

SFORZA.

Ay—presently !

[*Exit Bianca.*]

ROSSANO.

With what a majesty

She walks !

SFORZA.

She knows not that she has a brother,

And in her port already mocks the duchess.

ROSSANO.

She would have made a glorious queen, my Lord !

SFORZA.

She *should* have made one—but I cannot talk on't !

Let's forth upon our errand, and forget

There was a crown in Milan.

[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

[*Pasquali's chamber. Fiametta sitting with his cap in her hand.*]

FIAMETTA.

What wilt thou do for a black feather, Pasquali?

PASQUALI.

Hast thou no money?

FIAMETTA.

No—save my dowry of six pieces.

PASQUALI.

Give the pieces to me, and thy dowry will be ten times greater.

FIAMETTA.

An it be not six times less, I will never trust counting upon fingers.

PASQUALI.

Hast thou no dread of dying uncelebrated?

FIAMETTA.

If it be sin, I have a dread of it by baptism.

PASQUALI.

Is it a sin to neglect thy immortality?

FIAMETTA.

Ay—it is.

PASQUALI.

Then take heed how thou fallest into sin—for to be the friend of a poet is to be immortal, and thou art no friend of mine if I have not thy six pieces.

FIAMETTA.

But how shall I have six times more, master Pasquali?

PASQUALI.

In reputation! Wouldst thou marry a fool?

FIAMETTA.

No, truly.

PASQUALI.

Then if thy husband be wise, he will be more proud that thou art famous, than covetous of thy six pieces.

FIAMETTA.

And shall I be famous? (*Gives him the money.*)

PASQUALI.

Thou wilt live when Sforza is dead!

FIAMETTA.

Is not Sforza famous, then ?

PASQUALI.

He hath fame while he lives, and so had king Priam of Troy. But if Homer had not written, Priam would have been forgot and Troy too ; and if Sforza live not in poetry, he is as dead in a century—as thou and Laura were, but for thy favors to Petrarch and Pasquali.

FIAMETTA.

Why does not Sforza give thee six pieces and be immortal ?

PASQUALI.

Truly—he pays more for a less matter ! It is the blindness of great men that they slight the poets. Look here now—hath not Sforza shed blood, and wasted treasure, and taken a thousand murders on his soul, to leave a name after him ?

FIAMETTA.

I misdoubt he hath.

PASQUALI.

Now will I, whom he thinks less worthy than a trumpeter, sit down, and with a scrape of my pen, make a dog's name more known to posterity.

FIAMETTA.

When thou speakest of a dog, I think of my Lady's

page. Canst thou tell me why she should love him so out of reason?

PASQUALI.

Canst thou tell me why the moon riseth not every night, as the sun every day?

FIAMETTA.

No—truly.

PASQUALI.

Neither can I give thee reason for a woman's fancy—which is as unaccountable in its caprice as the moon in its changes. Hence the sun is called "*he*," the moon "*she*."

FIAMETTA.

Holy Virgin—what it is to be learned!

PASQUALI.

Come, Fiametta! spend thy dowry while thy mind is enlightened!

FIAMETTA.

If I should repent now!

PASQUALI.

Think not of it. If thou should'st repent to-morrow, I shall still go beseeemingly to the funeral, and thou wilt be famous past praying for. Come away!

SCENE II.

[*The garden of the palace of Milan. Enter Bianca, in mourning, followed by Sarpellione.*]

BIANCA.

Liar—'tis not true!

SARPELLIONE.

Will't please you read this letter from the King,
Writ when he sent him to you—

BIANCA, (*plucks it from him, and tears it to pieces.*)

'Tis a lie

Writ by thyself—

SARPELLIONE, (*taking up the pieces.*)

The King has written here
The story of his birth, and that he is
Your brother, pledges his most royal honor—

BIANCA.

Lie upon lie—

SARPELLIONE.

And will maintain the same
With sword and battle!

BIANCA.

Let him! There's a Sforza

Will whip him back to Naples! Tell him so!
There'll be a Duke upon the throne of Milan,
In three days more, whose children will be kings!

SARPELLIONE.

Your brother, Madam!

BIANCA.

Liar, no! my husband!
The crown is mine, and *I* will give it him!

SARPELLIONE.

Pardon me, Lady, 'tis not yours to give!
While a Visconti lives—and one *does* live—
Princely, and like his father—'tis not yours—
And Sforza dare not take it.

BIANCA.

He *has* taken it,
In taking me. Sforza is Duke, I say!

SARPELLIONE.

Am I dismiss'd to Naples with this news?

BIANCA.

Ay—on the instant!

SARPELLIONE.

Will you give me leave
To bid the Prince make ready for his journey?

BIANCA.

What Prince?

SARPELLIONE.

Your brother, Madam, who'll come back
With the whole league of armed Italy
To take the crown he's born to.

BIANCA.

I've a page
I love, called Giulio! If you mean to ask me
If he goes with you—lying traitor! no!
I love him, and will keep him!

SARPELLIONE.

Ay—till Milan
Knows him for Prince, and then farewell to Sforza!
He's flown too near the sun!

BIANCA.

Foul raven, silence!
What dost *thou* know of eagles who wert born
To mumble over carrion! Hast thou look'd
On the high front of Sforza! Hast thou heard
The thunder of his voice? Has met his eye?
'Tis writ upon his forehead: "*born a king!*"
Read it, blind liar!

SARPELLIONE.

Upon your brother's, Lady,
The world shall read it.

BIANCA.

Wilt thou drive me mad?

They say all breathing nature has an instinct
Of that which would destroy it. I of thee
Feel that abhorrence! If a glistering serpent
Hiss'd in my path, I could not shudder more,
Nor would I kill it sooner—so begone!
I'll strike thee dead else!

SARPELLIONE.

Madam!

(Exit Sarpellione.)

BIANCA.

'Tis my brother!

At the first word with which he broke it to me
My heart gave nature's echo! 'Tis my brother!
I would that he were dead—and yet I love him—
Love him so well, that I could die for him—
Yet hate him that he bars the crown from Sforza.
He's betwixt me and Heaven! were *he* but dead!
Sforza and I would, like the sun and moon,
Have all the light the world has! He must die!
Milan will rise for him—his boyish spirit
Is known and loved in every quarter of it.
Naples is powerful, and Venice holds
Direct succession holy, and the lords
Of all the Marches will cry “down usurper!”
For Sforza's glory has o'ershadowed their's.
Both cannot live, or I must live unloved—
And that were hell—or die, and Heaven without him

Were but a hell—for I've no soul to go there!
Nothing but love! no memory but that!
No hope! no sense!—Heaven were a madhouse to me!
Hark! who comes here?

(Enter Sarpellione and Brunorio. Bianca conceals herself.)

SARPELLIONE.

Strike but this blow, Brunorio—
And thou'rt a made man!

BRUNORIO.

Sforza sleeps not well.

SARPELLIONE.

Art thou less strong of arm than he who called thee
A brainless ass!

BRUNORIO.

'Sdeath, he did call me so!

SARPELLIONE.

And more I never told thee. Pay him for it—
And thou wilt save a Prince who'll cherish thee,
And Sforza's soul a murder—for he'll kill him
Ere one might ride to Naples.

BRUNORIO.

Think'st thou so?

SARPELLIONE.

Is it not certain? If this boy were dead

Sforza were Duke. With Milan at his back
He were the devil. Rather than see this,
Alfonso would share half his kingdom with thee.

BRUNORIO.

I'll do it!

SARPELLIONE.

Thou wilt save a Prince's life
Whom he would murder. Now collect thy senses,
And look around thee! On that rustic bank,
Close by the fountain, with his armor off,
He sleeps away the noon.

BRUNORIO.

With face uncovered?

SARPELLIONE.

Sometimes—but oftener with his mantle drawn
Quite over him! But thou must strike so well,
That, should he see thee, he will never tell on't.

BRUNORIO.

I'd rather he were covered.

SARPELLIONE.

'Tis most likely—
But mark the ground well. By this alley here,
You'll creep on unperceived. If he's awake—
You're his Lieutenant, and may have good reason
To seek him any hour! Are you resolved?

BRUNORIO.

I am!

SARPELLIONE.

Once more look round you!

BRUNORIO.

If he sleep
To-morrow, he'll ne'er wake!

SARPELLIONE.

Why, that's well said—
Come now and try the horse I've chosen for you.
We'll fly like birds with welcome news to Naples!

(Exeunt Sarpellione and Brunorio.)

BIANCA.

Thank God that I was here! Can there be souls
So black as these—to plot so foul a murder!
Oh unrequitive and silent Heavens!
Heard you these men? Thank God that I can save him!
The sun shone on them—*on these murderers*—
As it shines now on *me*!—Would it were Giulio
They thought to murder!—Ha! what ready fiend
Whisper'd me that? Giulio *instead* of Sforza!
Why that were murder—*too*!—Brunorio's murder!—
Not mine!—my hands would show no blood for it!
If Giulio were asleep beneath the mantle
To-morrow noon, and Sforza in his chamber—

What murder lies upon my soul for that?

.....

I'll come again to-night, and see the place,
And think on't in the dark!

[*Exit Bianca.*]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

[*Same scene in the garden. Enter Bianca.*]

BIANCA.

No! no! come hate—come worse indifference!
Come any thing—I will not! He is gone
To bring me flowers now, for he sees I'm sad;
Yet, with his delicate thought, asks not the reason,
But tries to steal it from me!—*could* I kill him!
His eyes grew moist this morn, for I was pale—
With thinking of his murder! *could* I kill him!
Oh Sforza! I could walk on burning ploughshares,
But not kill pitying Giulio! I could starve—
Or freeze with wintry cold—or swallow fire—
Or die a death for every drop of blood
Kneeling at my sad heart, but not kill Giulio!
No—no—no! no!

(*Sforza comes in dejectedly.*)

My Lord! My noble Lord!

SFORZA.

Give you good day, Bianca!

BIANCA.

Are you ill,
That you should drop your words so sorrowfully?

SFORZA.

I am not ill, nor well!

BIANCA.

Not well?

SFORZA.

The pulse
Beats on sometimes, when the heart quite runs down.
I'm very well!

BIANCA.

My Lord, you married me—
The priest said so—to share both joy and sorrow.
For the last privilege I've shed sweet tears!—
If I'm not worthy—

SFORZA.

Nay—you are!— I thank you
For many proofs of gentle disposition,
Which, to say truth, I scarcely look'd for in you—
Knowing that policy, and not your choice,
United us!

BIANCA.

My Lord!

SFORZA.

I say you're worthy,
For this, to see my heart—if you could do so,
But there's a grief in't now which brings you joy,
And so you'll pardon me !

*(Giulio comes in with a heap of flowers, which he
throws down and listens.)*

BIANCA.

That cannot be !

SFORZA.

Listen to this. I had a falcon lately,
That I had train'd, till, in the sky above him,
He was the monarch of all birds that flew.
I loved him next my heart, and had no joy,
But to unloose his feet, and see the eagle
Quail at his fiery swoop ! I brought him here !
Sitting one day upon my wrist, he heard
The nightingale you love, sing in the tree,
While I applauded him. With jealous heart
My falcon sprang to kill him ; and with fear
For your sweet bird, I struck him to my feet ;
And since that hour, he droops. His heart is broke,
And he'll ne'er soar again !

PAGE.

Why, one such bird
Were worth a thousand nightingales.

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(Poor boy!

He utters his own doom!) (*To Sf.*) My Lord, I have
A slight request, which you will not refuse me.
Please you, to-day sleep in your chamber. I
Will give you reason for't.

SFORZA.

Be't as you will!

The noon creeps on apace, and in my dreams
I may forget this heaviness. (*Goes in.*)

BIANCA.

Be stern,

Strong heart! and think on Sforza! Giulio!

PAGE.

Madam!

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(He's hot and weary now, and will drink freely
This opiate in his cup, and from his sound
And sudden sleep he'll wake in Paradise.)
Giulio, I say! (*She mixes an opiate.*)

PAGE.

Sweet Lady, pardon me!

I dream'd I was in Heaven, and fear'd to stir
Lest I should jar some music. Was't your voice
I heard sing, 'Giulio?'

BIANCA, (*aside.*)

(Oh, ye pitying angels,
Let him not love me most, when I would kill him.)
Drink ! Giulio !

PAGE.

Is it sweet ?

BIANCA.

The sweetest cup
You'll drink in this world !

PAGE.

I can make it sweeter—

BIANCA.

And how ?

PAGE.

With your health in it !

BIANCA.

Drink it not !

Not my health ! Drink what other health thou wilt !
Not mine—not mine !

PAGE.

Then here's the noble falcon
That Sforza told us of ! Would you not kill
The nightingale that broke his spirit, Madam ?

BIANCA.

Oh Giulio ! Giulio ! (*Weeps.*)

PAGE.

Nay—I did not think
You loved your singing bird so well, dear lady !

BIANCA.

(He'll break my heart !)

PAGE.

Say truly ! if the falcon
Must pine unless the nightingale were dead,
Would you not kill it ?

BIANCA.

Tho' my life went with it—
I must do so !

PAGE.

Why—so I think ! And yet
If I had fed the nightingale, and lov'd him ;
And he were innocent, as, after all,
He is, you know—I should not like to kill him—
Not with my own hands !

BIANCA.

Now, relentless Heavens,
Must I be struck with daggers thro' and through !
Speaks not a mocking demon with his lips ?
I will not kill him !

PAGE.

Sforza has gone in—

May I sleep there, sweet lady, in his place ?

BIANCA.

No—boy ! thou shalt not !

PAGE.

Then will you ?

BIANCA.

Oh God !

I would I could ! and have no waking after !

Come hither, Giulio ! nay—nay—stop not there !

Come on a little, and I'll make thy pillow

Softer than ever mine will be again !

Tell me you love me ere you go to sleep !

PAGE.

With all my soul, dear Mistress ! (*Drops asleep.*)

BIANCA.

Now he sleeps !

This mantle for his pall—but stay—his shape

Looks not like Sforza under it. Fair flowers

(*Heaps them at his feet, and spreads the mantle over all.*)

Your innocence to his ! Exhale together,

Pure spirit and sweet fragrance ! So—one kiss !

Giulio ! my brother ! Who comes there ? Wake, Giulio !

Or thou'lt be murdered ! Nay—'twas but the wind !

(*Withdraws on tiptoe, and crouches behind a tree.*)

I will kneel here and pray !

(Brunorio creeps in, followed by Sarpellone at a distance.)

Hark !

SARPELLIONE.

See—he sleeps.

Strike well, and fear not !

BIANCA, *(springing forward as he strikes.)*

Giulio! Giulio! wake!

Ah God!

(She drops on the body, the murderer escapes and Sforza rushes in. As he bends over her the scene closes.)

SCENE II.

[A road outside the walls of Milan. Enter Sarpellone and Brunorio, flying from the city, and met by Pasquali.]

PASQUALI.

What news, sirs ?

(As they attempt to pass him without answer, he steps before Sarpellone.)

Stay, Count, I've a word with you !

SARPELLIONE.

Stand off, and let me pass !

PASQUALI.

Nay, with your leave,
One single word !

SARPELLIONE.

Brunorio ! hasten forward,
And loose my bridle ! I'll be there o' th' instant !

(Brunorio hastens on.)

What would you say ?

PASQUALI.

My Lord ! I hear the bell
Tolling in Milan, that is never heard
But at some dread alarm.

SARPELLIONE, *(pressing to go on.)*

Is that all ?

PASQUALI.

Stay !

I met a flying peasant here just now,
Who mutter'd of some *murder*, and flew on !

SARPELLIONE.

Slave ! let me pass !

(Draws, and Pasquali confronts him with his sword.)

PASQUALI.

My Lord! you once essayed
To tempt me to a murder. Something tells me
That this hot haste has guilt upon its heels,
And you shall stay till I know more of it.
Down with your point!

SARPELLIONE.

Villain! respect my office!

PASQUALI.

No "villain," and no murderer! In Milan
They've soldiers' law, and if your skirts are bloody,
You'll get small honor for your coat, Ambassador!
Bear back, I say!

*(They fight, and Sarpellione falls, disarmed, on his
knee.)*

SARPELLIONE.

In mercy, spare my life!

PASQUALI.

Up, coward! You shall go before to Milan,
And meet the news! If you are innocent,
I'll ne'er believe a secret prompting more.
If not, I've done the state a worthy service.
On, on, I say!

*(Drives Sarpellione out before him at the point of his
sword.)*

SCENE III.

[*A room of state in the palace. Enter Rossano and a Priest.*]

ROSSANO.

Will she not eat ?

PRIEST.

She hath not taken food

Since the boy died !

ROSSANO.

Nor slept ?

PRIEST.

Nor closed an eyelid !

ROSSANO.

What does she ?

PRIEST.

Still, with breathless repetition,
Goes thro' the Page's murder—makes his couch
As he lay down i' the garden—heaps again
The flowers upon him to eke out his length ;
Then kisses him, and hides to see him kill'd !
'Twould break your heart to look on't.

ROSSANO.

Is't the law

That she must crown him ?

PRIEST.

If, upon the death
Of any Duke of Milan, the succession
Fall to a daughter, she may rule alone,
Giving her husband neither voice nor power
If she so please. But if she delegate
The crown to him, or in extremity
Impose it, it is not legitimate,
Save he is crown'd by her own living hands.
In presence of the council.

(Enter Sforza, hastily, in full armor, except the helmet.)

SFORZA.

Ho! Rossano!

ROSSANO.

My Lord!

SFORZA.

Send quick, and summon in the council
To see the crown imposed! Bianca dies!
My throne hangs on your speed! Fly!

(Exit Rossano.)

Sentry, ho!

Despatch a hundred of my swiftest horse
Tow'rd Naples! Bring me back Sarpellione!
Alive or dead, a thousand ducats for him!
Quick!

(Exit sentinel, re-enter Rossano.)

ROSSANO.

I have sped your orders !

(Enter a messenger.)

Please, my Lord,

Lady Bianca prays your presence with her !

SFORZA.

Away ! I'll come ! *(To Rossano.)* Go, man the citadel

With my choice troops ! Post them at every gate !

Send for the Milanese to scout or forage,

I care not what, so they're without the wall !

And hark, Rossano ! if you hear a knell

Wail out before the coronation peal,—

Telling to Milan that Bianca's dead,

And there's no Duke—down with the ducal banner,

And, like an eagle, to the topmost tower.

Up with my gonfalon ! Away !

(Re-enter the messenger from Bianca.)

My Lord—

SFORZA.

I come ! I come !

PASQUALI, *(without.)*

In, in !

(Enter Sarpellione, followed by Pasquali.)

SARPELLIONE, *(aghast at the sight of Sforza.)*

Alive !

SFORZA.

Ha, devil!

Have you come back to get some fresher news?
Alfonso'd know who's Duke! While you are hanging,
I'll ride to Naples with the news myself!
Ha! ha! my star smiles on me!

*(Bianca rushes in, and crouches at the side of Sforza,
as if hiding from something beyond him.)*

BIANCA.

Hark! I hear them!

Come! come! Brunorio!—If you come not quick,
My heart will break and wake him!

(Presses her hand painfully to her side.)

Crack not yet!

Nay, think on Sforza! Think 'tis for his love!
Giulio will be an angel up in Heaven,
And Sforza will drink glory from *my* hand!
Come! come! Brunorio! *(Screams piercingly.)*
Ah, who murder'd Giulio!

Not I!—not I! not I!

SFORZA, *(watching her with emotion.)*

Oh God! how dearly
Are bought the proudest triumphs of this world!

BIANCA.

Will the bell never peal!

PRIEST, (*to an attendant.*)

On that string only
Her mind plays truly now. Her life hangs on it!
The waiting for the bell of coronation
Is the last link that holds!

SFORZA, (*raising her.*)

My much-lov'd wife!

BIANCA.

Is it thee, Sforza? Has the bell pealed yet?

SFORZA.

Think not of that, but take some drink, Bianca!
You'll kill me this way!

BIANCA, (*dashing down the cup.*)

Think you I'll drink fire!

SFORZA.

Then taste of this! (*Offers her a pomegranate.*)

BIANCA, (*laughing bitterly.*)

I'm not a fool! I know
The fruit of Hell has ashes at the core!
Mock me some other way!

SFORZA.

My poor Bianca!

BIANCA.

Ha! ha! that's well done! You've the shape of Sforza,
And you're a devil, and can mock his voice,

But Sforza never spoke so tenderly !

You *overdo* it ! Ha ! ha ! ha !

SFORZA.

God help me,

I would her brother had been Duke in Milan

And I his slave—so she had liv'd and lov'd me !

BIANCA.

Can you see Heaven from hence ! I thought 'twas part

Of a soul's agony in Hell to see

The blest afar off ? Can I not see Giulio ?

(Struggles, as if to escape something before her eyes.)

Sforza's between !

SFORZA.

Bianca ! sayst thou that ?

(Struggles with himself a moment.)

Nay, then, 'tis time to say farewell Ambition !

(Turns to the Priest.)

Look, father ! I'm unskill'd in holy things,

But I have heard, the sacrifice of that

Which the repenting soul lov'd more than Heaven,

Will work a miracle !

(Takes his sword from his scabbard, and proceeds in a deeper voice.)

I love my sword

As never mother loved her rosy child !

My heart is in its hilt—my life, my soul,

Follow it like the light! Say thou dost think
If I give that up for a life of peace,
Heav'n will give back her reason—

PRIEST, (*eagerly.*)

Doubt it not!

SFORZA.

Then—take it!

(*Drops the hilt into his hand, and holds it a moment.*)

SARPELLIONE, (*in a hoarse whisper.*)

Welcome news for King Alfonso!

SFORZA, (*starting.*)

Fiend! sayst thou so! Nay, then, come back my sword.
I'll follow in its gleaming track to Naples
If the world perish!

(*Enter Rossano.*)

Now, what news, Rossano?

ROSSANO.

In answer to your wish, the noble council
Consent to see the crown imposed in private,
Three delegated lords will presently
Attend you here!

SFORZA, (*energetically.*)

Tell him who strikes the bell,
To look forth from his tower and watch this window!
When he shall see a handkerchief wave hence
Let him peal out. (*Attendant goes out.*)

My gonfalon shall float
Over St. Mark's before Foscari dreams
There's a new Duke in Milan ! Let Alfonso
Look to the north !

(Enter attendant.)

ATTENDANT.

My Lord ! the noble council
Wait to come in !

(Sforza waves his hand, and they enter.)

1ST LORD.

Health to the noble Sforza !

SFORZA.

My lords, the deep calamity we suffer
Must cut off ceremony. Milan's heiress
Lies there before you, failing momentarily,
But holds in life to give away the crown.
If you're content to see her put it on me
Let it be so as quickly as it may !
Give signal for the bell !

(The handkerchief is waved and the bell peals. Bianca rises to her feet.)

BIANCA.

It peals at last !
Where am I ? Bring some wine, dear Giulio !
(Looks round fearfully.)

Am I awake now! I've been dreaming here
That he was dead! Oh God! a horrid dream!
Come hither, Sforza! I have dreamt a dream,
If I can tell it you—will make your hair
Stand up with horror!

SFORZA.

Tell it not!

BIANCA.

This Giulio

Was, in my dream, my brother! how I knew it
I do not now remember—but I *did*!
And lov'd him—(that you *know* must be a dream)
Better than you!

SFORZA.

What—better?

BIANCA.

Was't not strange?

Being my brother, he must have the crown!
Stay!—is my father dead—or was't i' the dream too?

SFORZA.

He's dead, Bianca!

BIANCA.

Well! you lov'd me not,
And Giulio *did*—and somehow you should hate me
If he were Duke; and so I kill'd him, *loving me*,
For you that *lov'd me not*! Is it not strange

That we can dream such things? The manner of it—
To see it in a play would break your heart—
It was so pitiless! Look here! this boy
Brings me a heap of flowers!—I'll show it you
As it was done before me in the dream!
Don't weep! 'twas but a dream—but I'll not sleep
Again till I've seen Giulio—the blood seem'd
So ghastly natural! I shall see it, Sforza,
Till I have pass'd my hand across his side!

(Turning to the attendants.)

Will some one call my Page?

SFORZA.

My own Bianca,

Will you not drink?

(She drops the cup in horror.)

BIANCA.

Just such a cup as that
Had liquid fire in't when the deed was done—
A devil mock'd me with it!

(Another cup is brought, and she drinks.)

This is wine!

Thank God, I wake now!

(She turns to an attendant.)

Will you see if Giulio

Is in the garden?

SFORZA.

Strike the bell once more?

BIANCA.

He kiss'd me ere he slept—wilt listen, Sforza?

SFORZA.

Tell me no more, sweet one!

BIANCA.

And then I heap'd

The very flowers he brought me, at his feet,

To eke his body out as long as yours—

Was't not a hellish dream?

[(The bell strikes again, and she covers her ears in horror.)]

That bell! Oh God,

'Tis no dream—now I know—yes—yes—I know

These be the councillors—and you are Sforza,

And that's Rossano—and I kill'd my brother

To make you Duke! Yes, yes! I see it all!

Oh God! Oh God!

(She covers her face, and weeps.)

SFORZA.

My Lords! her reason rallies.

Little by little. With this flood of tears,

Her brain's reliev'd, and she'll give over raving.

My wife! Bianca! If thou ever lov'd'st me,

Look on my face!

BIANCA.

Oh, Sforza, I have given

For thy dear love, the eyes I had to see it,
The ears to hear it. I have broke my heart
In reaching for't.

SFORZA.

Ay—but 'tis thine *now*, sweet one!
The life-drops in my heart are less dear to me!

BIANCA.

Too late! you've crush'd the light out of a gem
You did not know the price of! Had you spoken
But *one* kind word upon my bridal night!

SFORZA.

Forgive me, my Bianca!

BIANCA.

I am parch'd

With thirst now, and my eyes grow faint and dim.
Are you here, Sforza! mourn not for me long!
But bury me with Giulio! (*Starts from him.*)

Hark! I hear

His voice now! Do the walls of Paradise
Jut over Hell? I heard his voice, I say!

(*Strikes off Sforza, who approaches her.*)

Unhand me, devil! You've the shape of one
Who upon earth had no heart! Can you take
No shape but that? Can you not look like Giulio?

(*Sforza falls back, struck with remorse.*)

Hark! 'tis his low, imploring voice again—
He prays for poor Bianca! And look, see you!
The portals stir! Slow, slow—and difficult!—

(Creeps forward with her eyes upward.)

Pray on, my brother! Pray on, Giulio!

I come! *(Falls on her face.)*

(Sforza drops on his knee, pale and trembling.)

SFORZA.

My soul shrinks with unnatural fear!

What heard I then? "Sforza, give up thy sword!"

Was it from Heaven or Hell!

(Shrinks, as if from some spectre in the air.)

I will! I will!

(Holds out his sword as if to the monk, and Sarpellione, who has been straining forward to watch Isabella, springs suddenly to her side.)

SARPELLIONE.

She's dead! Ha! ha! who's Duke in Milan now?

(Sforza rises with a bound.)

SFORZA.

Sforza!

(He flies to the window, and waves the handkerchief. The bell peals out, and as he rushes to Isabella, she moves, lifts her head, looks wildly around, and struggles to her feet. Rossano gives her the crown—she looks an instant smilingly on Sforza, and with a difficult but calm effort places it on his head. All drop on one knee to do allegiance, and as Sforza lifts himself to his loftiest height, with a look of triumph at Sarpellione, Bianca sinks dead at his feet.)

[Curtain falls.]

ERRATA.

On page 108, for "*Isabella*," on the 12th and 20th lines from the top, read "*Bianca*."

Rec. 20. April, 1839.
No. 655.

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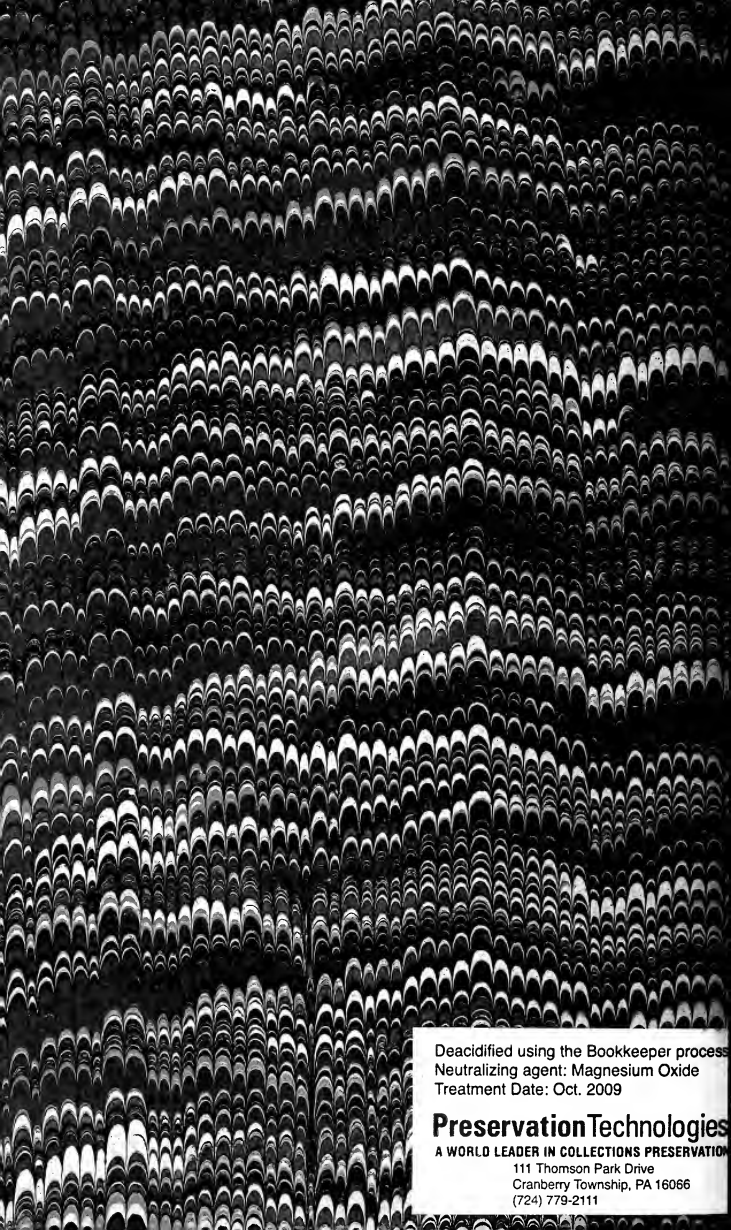
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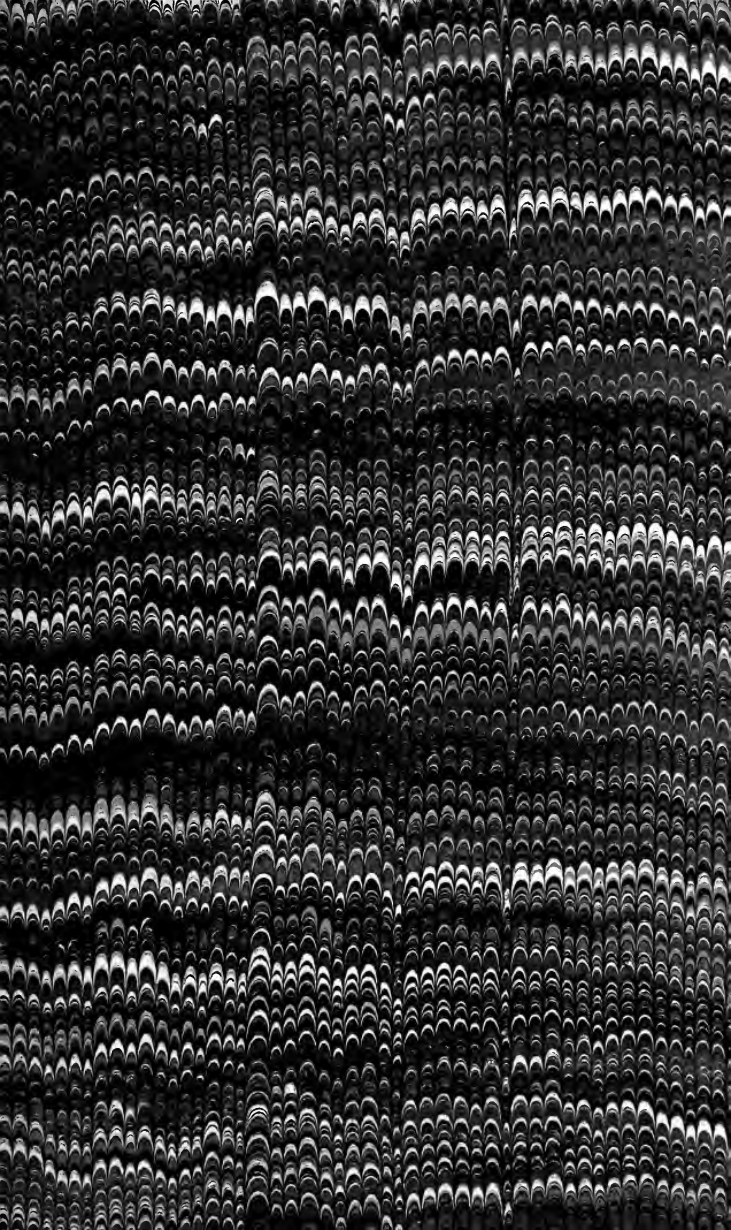


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